

Generalized Anxiety Disorder



Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is characterized by 6 months or more of chronic, exaggerated worry and tension that is unfounded or much more severe than the normal anxiety most people experience. People with this disorder usually expect the worst; they worry excessively about money, health, family, or work, even when there are no signs of trouble. They are unable to relax and often suffer from insomnia. Many people with GAD also have physical symptoms, such as fatigue, trembling, muscle tension, headaches, irritability or hot flashes.

Fortunately, through research supported by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and by industry, effective treatments have been developed to help people with GAD.

How Common Is GAD?

- About 2.8% of the adult U.S. population ages 18 to 54 – approximately 4 million Americans – has GAD during the course of a given year.
- GAD most often strikes people in childhood or adolescence, but can begin in adulthood, too. It affects women more often than men.

What Causes GAD?

Some research suggests that GAD may run in families, and it may also grow worse during stress. GAD usually begins at an earlier age and symptoms may manifest themselves more slowly than in most other anxiety disorders.

What Treatments Are Available for GAD?

Treatments for GAD include medications and cognitive-behavioral therapy.

Can People With GAD Also Have Other Illnesses?

Research shows that GAD often coexists with depression, substance abuse, or other anxiety disorders. Other conditions associated with stress, such as irritable bowel syndrome, often accompany GAD.

Patients with physical symptoms such as insomnia or headaches should also tell their doctors about their feelings of worry and tension. This will help the patient's health care provider to recognize that the person is suffering from GAD.

For more information about generalized anxiety disorder and other anxiety disorders, write:

The Anxiety Disorders Education Program,
National Institute of Mental Health
6001 Executive Blvd.,
Room 8184, MSC 9663,
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663.
Or call 301-443-4513.

Publications and other information are also available online from the NIMH Website at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov> or by calling toll-free 1-88-88-ANXIETY (1-888-826-9438).